

On Monday, October 22, 2007 @ 1:00 AM, a vegetation fire was reported by W-2 CAL FIRE Battalion Chief Suzanne TODD. She reported the location in the river bottom of the Guejito Creek just south of the Guejito Creek Bridge which is in the San Pasqual Valley.

W-2 TODD with Strike Team 9270c from Amador-El Dorado witnessed an arcing power line with fire in the Guejito Creek while enroute to the Witch Fire. The location of the fire was in Guejito Creek drainage on the south side of State Route 78 and ¼ mile west of Bandy Canyon Rd.

W-2 TODD reported the fire to the Monte Vista Emergency Command Center (MVUECC) and then had her Strike Team start suppression efforts. They did not attempt to go into the creek bottom due to the already sizable and fast spreading fire and being unfamiliar with the area, so they turned around on Hwy 78 to try to cut the fire off.

As of this report the acreage of the fire and the homes that were damaged or destroyed are unknown, due to the Guejito Fire and the Witch Fire merging at some point.

On Thursday, November 1, 2007, I was requested by Fire Prevention Bureau Chief Jim Garrett to locate and investigate Origin and Cause of the Guejito Fire. I was to determine whether it started in State Responsibility Lands (SRA) or in San Diego City. According to maps the fire started in SRA and immediately burned in a westerly direction onto San Diego City land.

Upon my initial assessment and after talking to W-2 TODD by cell phone, I found where the fire had started in the river bottom. It was possible there were multiple origins.

I asked her if she could return to the scene and point to where she saw the arcing and the fire start.

When W-2 TODD arrived, she told me that while they were traveling east bound on Hwy 78 and just past the San Diego Wild Animal Park, she noticed what she described as a "light show" coming from ahead of them. As the Strike Team got to the Guejito Creek bridge W-2 TODD noticed that the light show was arcing power lines. She also saw that a fire had started in the vegetation below where the lines were arcing. (See attachment E, Suzanne Todd statement.)

W-2 TODD noted the location as on the south side of Hwy 78 at the Guejito Creek Bridge. She said she gave that location to the MVUECC then directed her Strike Team to take action on the fire.

As I was looking at and flagging fire spread indicators I was also examining the power lines overhead to see if there was any indication of arcing. In the same span and below the power lines was a Cox Cable Communications line. I noticed a small gauged lashing wire that was wound around the communication cable for support. I looked at the whole length of the cable and noticed the lashing had come undone in several locations.

In two locations, I noticed that some of the lashing was dangling from the Cox cable line; the ends about 10 – 12 feet from the ground. I also found some of the same type wire lashing lying on the ground in the origin area. There was also some leftover undamaged lashing wire on the ground that appeared to have been left from a previous repair job.

On the ground in the origin area I noticed that there was some lashing wire which had been sooted and burned with beaded ends. It looked as if these pieces had come from the support cable.

I also noticed where it appeared that there had been some electrical contact with the leftover undamaged lashing wire on the ground and where electricity had followed the wire that was buried in the dirt giving it the appearance of dark veins following the wire under the dirt.

Looking at the wire ends that were dangling from the cable, I noticed they were also sooted and beaded. Looking at the power line through binoculars, which I called the south power line, I saw some damage to a strand and also found three spots where the lashing wire from the fiber optics cable was fused to the power line.

I interviewed W-5 Tyson SHORT who lives about 1000 feet east of where the fire had started. He told me he was watching the Witch Fire burning toward his house. During that time he noticed a bright flash behind him. He looked at toward the flash and saw arcing.



W-5 SHORT then said after seeing the arcing the second time he saw the fire start underneath where the arcing was. (See attachment H, Tyson Short statement.)

I also interviewed W-9 Lynnette SHORT, Tyson's wife. She told me shortly after the Guejito fire started she took her baby and they drove out of the area via Bandy Canyon Rd. This road goes from Hwy 78 in San Pasqual Valley to Highland Valley Rd. in Rancho Bernardo. She said at that time the Witch Fire appeared to be on the hill above the San Pasqual Academy just east of them about ½ mile. W-9 SHORT told me she watched the Guejito fire burn toward the west and south toward Bandy Canyon Rd. below her.

The Guejito fire eventually did burn over Bandy Canyon Rd. toward Rancho Bernardo.

While I was investigating, W-7 Larry HALL, O-1 Dean LE BRECHT and O-2 Randy LYLE, who were representing San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E/Sempra) arrived. I explained my findings and HALL thought the same as to the cause of the fire.

On Friday, November 2, 2007 I met with HALL, LYLE and LE BRECHT again and HALL told me that a SDG&E crew was coming out to replace the damaged span. Before the wire was put on a spool, the crew lowered the wire enough so we could inspect and photograph it.

After closer inspection, there were two areas on the power line where one strand of the wire had been burned through and three areas where the lashing wire from the COX Cable line had been fused to the power line..

The wire was put on a large spool and I attached a CAL FIRE evidence tag to it before leaving the scene.

Due to the size of the spool I agreed to SDG&E taking it to their facility in Escondido for the night and locked up for security. The next day, the wire was transferred to a smaller spool and taken to the SDG&E facility in El Cajon to be secured. On November 11, 2007, the spool was transferred to our CAL FIRE evidence locker.

On November 3, 2007 I met with Cox Cable representatives at the origin area. I showed them my findings as to what I thought what happened. They brought their service trucks and lowered the support cable to which the fiber optics cable was lashed. On that cable there were two areas where one strand had burned completely through and several areas showing arcing.

The fiber optics cable had some minor marks and some sooting but was not damaged enough to take out of service. The Cox Communications cable was not removed from service.

I cut and took into evidence the two pieces of support cable that were burned through. The rest of the cable was spooled and taken by Cox Communications.

W-10 HALL told me when the arcing occurred SDG&E equipment recorded a slight interruption in that line at 12:59 AM. Other than that there was no interruption in service from either the SDG&E lines or the Cox Communications cable.

## OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:

With the witness statements from Suzanne Todd and Tyson Short and finding the lashing wire from the COX Cable fiber optics line fused to the south power line in several areas, and finding some of that wiring on the ground sooted and beaded, it is my opinion that sometime during the wind event the lashing wire securing the fiber optics cable and the power line had come in contact with each other causing an arc and starting the fire. I also eliminated all other possible ignition sources, such as campfire, smoking and vehicles.

### Case Disposition

The case remains open and additional information and material items will be requested from San Diego Gas & Electric or COX Communications. Physical evidence in their possession and any additional physical evidence collected will be examined by technical experts for opinions and conclusions.



## **Fire Cause Determination**

### Lightning (Detection Method)

No lightning in the area during the whole month of October.

### Equipment Use (Exhaust, Brake Shoe, Aircraft, Vehicle Fire, Grinding, Other)

Origin area(s) were about 150 feet from the nearest road.

### Smoking (Tobacco, Other)

Even though humidity's were low, nobody was seen in the origin area and no cigarette butts were found.

### Campfire (Cooking, Warming, Ceremonial, Other)

No evidence of camping was found at or near the origin.

### Debris Burning (Land, Slash, Refuse, Pile, Barrel, Agriculture/Dooryard, Clearance, Screen, Permit, Other)

No evidence of debris burning was found near or in the origin of the fire.

### Railroad (Ignition Activities Associated with Railroad Companies)

No railroad in the area

### Incendiary (Ignition Component / Material First Ignited)

No evidence of any incendiary type devices were found in the origin area.

### Children (Ignition Activities Associated with Children)

No children live at or near the location or were seen in the area prior to the fire.

### Miscellaneous (Blasting, Structure, Fireworks, Pest Control, Logging, Power line, Glass, Target Shooting, Spontaneous Combustion, Other)

**A Power line and Cox Communications Cable coming into contact with each other due to the high winds was the most probable cause of the fire.**